

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (canceled).
2. (previously presented): The method according to claim 7, further comprising the step of providing said propulsion means (2) as at least one plasma thruster which operates using plasma created from the surrounding air at said high altitude.
3. (previously presented): The method according to claim 7, further comprising the step of providing said aircraft with at least one solar generator (5) cooled by convection with the surrounding air at said high altitude.
4. (previously presented): The method according to claim 7, further comprising the step of providing said aircraft with at least one storage battery (7) having superconductive components.
5. (previously presented): The method according to claim 7, further comprising the following steps:
 - on the ground, securing said aircraft (1) to an independent transporter (3);
 - causing said transporter (3) to take said aircraft (1) to the high altitude at which it is to operate, making use solely of said propulsion means ;

- causing said transporter (3) to release said aircraft (1) at the altitude (H) and at least approximately at the intended location of its operating station; and

- if necessary, causing said aircraft (1) to use said propulsion means (2) to put said aircraft finally on station and to take up its proper orientation.

6. (previously presented): The method according to claim 5, further comprising the step of providing said transporter (3) with at least one balloon (3) suitable for rising to the high altitude.

7. (currently amended): A method of replacing ~~a~~ an existing radio relay in a telecommunications network comprising a plurality of radio relays, the method comprising the steps of:

replacing said ~~existing~~ radio relay (10) by an aircraft (1) of the airplane or glider type which has propulsion means (2) enabling said aircraft (1) to maintain itself, to move itself, and to orient itself solely at high altitude;

providing said aircraft with transceiver means (15) for radio waves (16, 17); and

taking said aircraft (1) to an altitude and a position such that said transceiver means (15) lies in the same direction, relative to at least one user (11, 12) of said telecommunications network (RT), as said replaced relay (10), with operation between said transceiver means (15) and said user (11, 12) being performed via an already existing interface without modification thereof, thereby avoiding the need to modify the pointing direction of an antenna of said user.

8. (canceled).

9. (previously presented): The method according to claim 7, wherein the replaced relay is a satellite relay, and said high altitude to which said aircraft is taken is in the stratosphere above both the altitude of civilian air links and the altitude of earth's cloud ceiling.